

## Orange County Natural Areas Inventory

### UNIVERSITY LAKE MACROSITE

New Site 2004

**Site Number:** Macrosite #3

**Site Significance:** State

**Size:** 1,110 acres

**USGS Quads:** Chapel Hill,  
Farrington

The University Lake Macrosite protects critical wetlands, forests, and open space in the Morgan Creek drainage in Carrboro, and extends northwestward to provide a link to the Cane Creek watershed. Around the lake, a number of distinct habitat types occur in close proximity, yielding impressive numbers of flora and fauna, including three state-rare species. Upstream, a large block of undeveloped land supports bobcat, wild turkey, and other wide-ranging species, while another parcel contrasts mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) bluffs with wildflower-rich bottomland forest and breeding habitat for salamanders, including one state-rare species. The macrosite provides breeding habitat for a number of neotropical migrant birds. Habitats range from a lake to freshwater marshes, forested slopes, cool ravines, steep rocky bluffs, alluvial forest, chestnut oak forest, and an oxbow pool.

The University Lake Macrosite includes five standard sites and is of state significance, primarily due to the thriving population of a state-rare mussel (Savannah lilliput, *Toxolasma pullus*), which occurs in only four counties in North Carolina. McCauley Mountain (M03) supports extensive hardwood forests on its upper slopes, with mature oak-hickory around the summit. Some old white oaks (*Quercus alba*) measure two feet in diameter. Over 90 species of vertebrates have been documented from this hill, including regionally-rare species such as broad-winged hawk, worm-eating warbler, long-tailed weasel, green anole, and southeaster five-lined skink.

Slopes elsewhere around the lake support dry to mesic hardwoods; the former has a population of the state-rare sweet pinesap (*Monotropsis odorata*), while ravines with the latter have regionally rare maidenhair fern (*Adiantum pedatum*) and umbrella magnolia (*Magnolia tripetala*). The relative lack of beaver in Orange County means that natural marshes are very uncommon, but creation of University Lake led to the development of several marshes, especially in the south lobe of the lake (M05). These harbor a number of marsh and riparian plants, birds, turtles (seven species), and others. Berryhill Rhododendron Bluff (M07) is the only place where Catawba rhododendron (*Rhododendron catawbiense*) grows in Carrboro; this disjunct from the mountains grows at other sites in the gorge of Morgan Creek southeast of Chapel Hill. Also at Berryhill is one of very few populations of ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) in the county. In mesic ravines and along the creek grow impressive hardwoods, which support abundant spring wildflowers and provide a sense of “old-growth.”